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ABSTRACT

Paradox and therapeutic double bind techniques are used to overcome resistance in students with a history of success avoidance. Predictions of failure, restraining comments, and the use of paradox in the midst of an activity are defended theoretically by presenting historical roots and a rationale of effectiveness. A skill-building approach focuses on examples, practitioner concerns, and common mistakes. Examples include a delinquent adolescent, a recovering alcoholic and a female with sex role confusion. While more traditional direct approaches will remain the standard for instructors, the integration of paradoxical techniques into adventure-based education to overcome anticipated or actual resistance can enhance effectiveness. Assumptions underlying paradoxical learning contradict the medical model with its deterministic nature of genes and biochemistry by suggesting that human growth and learning can determine behavior. Those who choose to use the paradoxical approach are doing more than adding techniques to their repertoire, they are embracing a new set of assumptions about the nature and scope of human learning. (SKW)

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Paradox and Double Binds in Adventure-Based Education

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Abstract

This paper describes a way of integrating paradoxical and double bind techniques into adventure-based education. The emphasis is on a skill building approach focusing on offering examples, responding to practitioner concerns, and addressing common mistakes. In addition, the theoretical foundation of paradox is examined particularly in terms of its historical roots and the rationales underlying its claims of effectiveness. The specific techniques covered include 1) predictions of failure, 2) restraining comments, and 3) the utilization approach. The paper concludes by discussing the likelihood of a significant integration of paradoxical techniques into adventure-based education.

The ability to enhance student motivation is one of the most important skills of an Outward Bound instructor. Personal growth at Outward Bound is dependent on concrete achievements, on the mastery of difficult or apparently impossible challenges. Without sufficient motivation, students will not exert the effort and take the risks required for this mastery.

In general, instructors enhance student motivation via four techniques: inspiration, support, reasoning and confrontation. In inspiration, the instructor helps the student move past his[1] limits by imbuing him with uplifting ideals, such as the benefits of risk taking or the rewards of adventure. Many of the readings commonly employed on Outward Bound courses are good examples of the use of inspiration. When the instructor is practicing support, it is likely that he will encourage the student by techniques such as physical closeness, speaking in a calm or soothing tone of voice, and offering verbal reassurances. Reasoning includes techniques such as the presentation of rationales explaining the benefits of taking part in the course activity. Finally, use of confrontation involves actions such as pointing out that a student's choices will not lead to desirable goals, or stating that his behavior is inappropriate or maladaptive, or setting clear limits.

Their judicious employment of these four techniques often enhances student motivation; experienced instructors have numerous anecdotes describing how support, inspiration, reasoning or confrontation helped their students attain Outward Bound objectives. However, while these techniques are clearly both effective and useful, they do have one significant drawback: they tend to be quite predictable; that is, students are familiar with these approaches and expect them to be present at Outward Bound. Of course, fulfilling such expectations is not necessarily bad; acting in a predictable manner in the midst of a high stress situation is often comforting to students. However, one can run into difficulties with this predictability when working with "problem" students--that is, students who have long histories of avoiding success. Moreover, any student can act like a "problem" student given enough stress.

The four common motivational techniques--inspiration, support, reasoning and confrontation--do not only characterize Outward Bound, they are also frequently found in the real world. Virtually everyone has received a mixture of advice, heart to heart talks, firm limits, second chances, people who "believed in them," and so forth. What is so noteworthy about individuals with chronic problems is that they continue to manifest their inappropriate behaviors in spite of repeated exposure to contrary messages from others. They have often

spent years being unresponsive to the common ways that people try to change others; they frequently have sophisticated, well established defenses against inspiration, support, reasoning and confrontation.

Of course, a heavy enough dose of these direct techniques will often break through defenses; in fact, the efforts of many milieu therapy and substance abuse treatment programs are firmly based on that assumption. Unfortunately, however, breaking through defenses by this sort of frontal assault can take a long time and involve many setbacks. Moreover, some people are so skilled at resisting direct approaches that they successfully resist changes regardless of the amount of pressure applied to them. Their level of resistance is such that if it were being manifested for positive reasons, it might even be considered heroic or praiseworthy! Given this profound ability to stay the same, there is little wonder that treating such people is often so frustrating for therapists.

Recognizing the seriousness of this kind of resistance and the difficulties inherent in changing it by direct techniques, one school of psychotherapy has attempted to develop novel approaches that can surmount these defenses more efficiently and effectively. Some of the leading figures in this strategic or paradoxical school include Milton Erickson, Jay Haley, Paul Watzlawick, Cloe Madanes, Richard Fisch, and John Weakland. Their approaches are often called therapeutic paradoxes or therapeutic double binds because they tend to place the client in a special position--one full of apparent contradictions.

Before explaining their approach in detail, it is useful to first examine some of the problems one can encounter when trying to use direct techniques with resistant clients. One of the hallmarks of such clients or students is their rather remarkable ability to transform helpful suggestions into "lose-lose" double binds. An Outward Bound example of this ability--the capacity to transform a simple directive into a negative double bind--can be offered using the case of an imaginary delinquent adolescent.

When an instructor asks this adolescent to put on his pack and hike, this request potentially places the adolescent in a dilemma. If he complies with the instructor's suggestion, he is obeying an adult order. Not only does the delinquent have many experiences that have taught him that following an adult's advice often leads to problems, he also has typical teenage developmental needs to defy adults in order to sustain his newly formed sense of individuation. In addition, he belongs to a peer culture where he gains status by resisting adult directives. If the delinquent complies with the request, he will feel as if he is betraying his individuality, losing status, and trusting problematic advice. However, if he defies the request, he will reap the instructor's displeasure and is likely to become the recipient of a variety of negative consequences. In addition, he may lose the benefits of the Outward Bound course.

The adolescent is in a lose-lose situation. Given the way he sees the world, he has no choices that lead to unambiguous success and satisfaction. He has succeeded at transforming a helpful, direct suggestion--put on your pack and participate in this program--into a non-therapeutic double bind. It is no wonder that such adolescents are marked by hostility, distrust, depression, labile affect and other negative emotions and behaviors; their worldview, and the typical responses of others to that worldview, frequently double bind them into lose-lose situations.

Strategic therapists contrast this sort of negative double bind with another type of double bind--a positive or therapeutic double bind. In the negative double bind, the situation is structured so that no matter what choice is made, the individual experiences significant loss or damage. Conversely, a positive double bind exists when the individual is placed in a

position where all of his options lead to beneficial results.

A therapeutic double bind can be illustrated using a group of adolescents on a troubled youth course. Imagine that the course has been going well and that the group is almost through the initial acting out stage and is beginning to settle into the Outward Bound routine. However, as usual, a number of the students continue to be prone to antisocial behaviors.

In this sort of situation, the instructor might choose to tell the group that they were beginning to do very well on the course but that he has one concern. At Outward Bound, especially after things start going well and people are getting more motivated, the pace of the course sometimes gets faster; the group hikes further and more quickly, climbs more, and so on. This increase in the pace tends to make folks nervous because some students start wondering if they are going to be able to keep up; they start worrying that they might be the ones who will mess up and slow the group down.

In some groups, students solve this concern by having one or two students be the regular "screw-ups." These are the people who always get up late, or complain, or hike slowly, or forget something, or whatever. On the surface, it may seem like these people are messing up badly, but actually they do a lot for the rest of the group. First of all, it reassures the other students to know that they aren't the worst group member--the screw-up has being in last place all locked up. In addition, the screw-up usually distracts everyone from their own problems; there's nothing like finding a scapegoat to blame for everything when you're feeling blue.

At this point, the instructor stops and asks a few questions about scapegoating to ensure that the students understand these points. Following this brief discussion, he continues by pointing out that although the screw-up helps everybody else, he also tends to lose out pretty seriously. Most of the time, people are mad at him. So, while this group may choose to have a scapegoat to gain the benefits, maybe the only fair thing to do is to be willing to share the screw-up role around equally--kind of like K.P. is shared. Everyone could take a turn. The instructor wonders who would volunteer to be the first screw-up?

By providing a rationale requiring group members to act out, the instructor has created a different kind of double bind--a therapeutic double bind. At this point, the group can follow directions--an atypical act--and cooperate by having a member function as the scapegoat, or it can defy the instructor and refuse to allow any group member to assume that role.

It is most probable that the students will unite against the instructor and his "crazy" request and refuse to allow anyone to volunteer to be the scapegoat. Even if someone does volunteer, their misbehaviors will be pseudo misbehaviors--a play acting and not the real thing. The group is in a win-win situation; any choice it makes leads to success.

If a student does begin to act out genuinely, the instructors can comment that someone has decided to volunteer to help the group by being the scapegoat after all. This reference brings some humor into a typically tense, confrontive situation and provides an easy way for the acting out student to apologize without losing much face. He can agree that, yes, he was just doing a bit of spontaneous volunteering. Finally, if the situation continues to escalate, the group can be asked to view the misbehavior from a different context. They can be questioned about whether they really need this student to help them in this way. The students will probably respond in the negative and proceed to confront the misbehaving student about his unsolicited assistance and inappropriate behaviors.

One of the significant benefits of using therapeutic double binds is that they are un-

usual and unexpected; it is unlikely that a person who has chronically maladaptive personality strategies has ever encountered this type of intervention. As mentioned above, such people do have sophisticated ways of resisting typical change strategies, but they are usually defenseless against the paradoxical qualities of the double bind because they simply have never encountered it before. After all, how often is an adolescent asked to volunteer to act out?

While this quality of unexpectedness is valuable, it does not fully explain the efficacy of the double bind approach. More important is its "paradoxical" quality--its ability to reorder the student's worldview. In following a set of paradoxical directives, the student is impelled into a perspective that contradicts his normal way of structuring reality, a worldview that does not support the continuation of the student's problematic behaviors. This implicit reordering of reality is illustrated by the following example of an anxious student on an Outward Bound course who is worried about an upcoming climb.

Imagine that this student receives a standard Outward Bound intervention for anxiety, that is, suppose he is supported. Typically this support takes the form of comforting messages such as assuring him that the climb will be easy, telling him that he will be helped by the instructor or the patrol, or suggesting that he has the qualities needed to handle the challenge. While this type of support will be effective with many students, an individual who uses anxiety to maintain a maladaptive personality will not respond in a positive manner. Often he will resist the support with statements such as "It's easy for them but impossible for me," "They can't understand how I feel," "I've never done anything like this before," "I know I can't do it," and so on.

The more support such people receive, the more they argue how hard it will really be for them. Their strategy is quite effective--at least initially--in terms of achieving love, attention and repeated assurances from others that they are accepted. Unfortunately, it also makes them feel weak and helpless, especially since their role in the dialog requires them to argue the position that they are inadequate. The sign of the depth of their commitment to these maladaptive strategies is that they are capable of becoming more helpless regardless of the amount, quality and type of help offered. Everything leads them to assert their inadequacy: inspiration makes them feel weak, support causes them to claim they are not worth all the fuss that is being made over them, and confrontation generates tears plus an implicit or explicit counterattack accusing the confronter of a deficit in empathy.

To understand how a practitioner would use paradox to break this cycle, it is important to understand how anxiety is commonly conceptualized. Anxiety is perceived as one of those negative emotions which is beyond one's conscious control; it is "thrust" upon a person; there is no say about whether it comes or goes; the victims are not responsible for their own anxiety experience. A number of other problems are similarly defined; people with a hot temper claim that their anger "makes" them blow up; people with depression argue that their melancholy "overcomes" them no matter how much they resist; and shy people state that their nervousness "renders" them incapable of social intercourse.

A paradoxical approach will often focus its intervention on this involuntary quality of anxiety. As will be illustrated below, there is no direct confrontation with -or attempt to minimize the person's anxiety; rather, the paradoxical approach actually encourages the student to experience anxiety. However, the encouragement is offered in such a manner that it becomes difficult to continue to experience real anxiety.

Suppose that the instructor suggests that the student's anxiety is rooted in reality. The climb will be challenging and the instructor is happy to see that the student is really thinking about it and seriously considering all of the problems that could arise. However, perhaps the student needs to think even more about the difficulties; perhaps he needs to try to become more anxious. After all, anxiety is the root of caution and caution is a critically important quality on an Outward Bound course. Therefore, during the next three days, he would like the student to schedule three 45 minute periods each day to do nothing but worry about the upcoming climb. These scheduled "anxiety meditations" will guarantee the student's ability to successfully avoid all dangerous actions.

If the student attempts to follow these instructions sincerely, it will be impossible for him to have a genuine anxiety attack. As discussed above, since by definition anxiety is something which arises without solicitation--something that is never invited nor welcomed--the consciously created anxiety generated through this assignment is not "real" anxiety. One cannot experience genuine anxiety if one invites it, one can only have a sort of pseudoanxiety. Worries come by themselves; trying to worry makes it impossible to truly worry. In sum, the paradoxical instructions have made it impossible for this student to manifest normal anxiety. He can either have a pseudoanxiety experience or he can decide that the whole assignment is silly and that he will not waste his time with anxiety. In this second choice, the student has shifted his efforts from resisting anxiety to resisting the assignment.

Sometimes beginners who use paradoxical approaches believe that they are effective simply because people are polarity responders; that is, people tend to do the opposite of whatever they are told. However, the preceding example illustrates a deeper, more sophisticated, and more fundamental aspect of paradox: its ability to utilize the student's worldview in such a way that either the worldview must be abandoned (the student gives up perceiving himself as an anxious person) or the literal experience is abandoned (he has a pseudoanxiety attack instead of a genuine anxiety attack).

Paradox is defined in the dictionary as "an argument that derives self-contradictory conclusions by valid deduction from acceptable premises." The therapeutic paradox above was built on an acceptable premise (caution is important in Outward Bound) and it had valid deductions (your anxiety is positive because it leads to caution; please practice it frequently) and it reached a self-contradictory conclusion (invited anxiety is not real anxiety). The self-contradictory nature of the experience is so uncomfortable or so freeing that the student either abandons the problem entirely or redefines it drastically; usually the drastic redefinition eliminates the problematic aspect of the situation.

Paradox is not a new way of changing human perceptions and behaviors. The Zen koan of "the sound of one hand clapping" is an example of a spiritual paradox designed to alter an individual's perceptions of reality. The eastern martial arts practice of using an opponent's own momentum against him is another example. While, therefore, the use of paradox may not be new from a historical perspective, it is new to modern psychotherapy. The introduction of indirect techniques has offered a significant challenge to an almost century long dependence on direct techniques of facilitating human growth and learning.

Prediction of Failure Double Binds

Obviously, paradox and double binds are advanced techniques. It does not take much imagination to realize that there are a number of ways a beginner can get in trouble with such approaches. Realizing this, most therapists who use paradox have been trained for years in its employment and know when, how, and with whom it will be successful. Outward Bound instructors would probably do well to refrain from using these techniques unless they have special training and supervision in paradoxical psychotherapy.

However, while the advanced paradoxical techniques may be beyond the reach of an average instructor, there are simple and safe forms of double binding which can be used by any Outward Bound staff member, even one who has had little or no training in this area. Perhaps the simplest paradoxical technique is the prediction of failure.

A prediction of failure is usually presented as part of an introduction to an Outward Bound activity. It has three components: 1) a rationale for the prediction of failure that is so convincing that it cannot be discounted or ignored; 2) compelling descriptions of ways the students are likely to fail in the upcoming activity; and 3) suggestions that it will be difficult and/or unlikely for the students to avoid these particular ways of failing.

The paradoxical technique of predicting failure is only successful if the instructor is able to make such a profound connection with the students that his message cannot be ignored. A simple prediction alone is unlikely to be effective; one must "hook" the students. If the instructor can deliver the prediction in such a manner that the group can not refute, ignore or forget the instructor's insights and rationales, then they pass through the Outward Bound activity in the context of the prediction. Instead of their behavior simply being a reaction to whatever course event they encounter, the behavior will be a reaction to the course event as framed by the prediction.

Effective pacing is the primary technique responsible for forming this kind of profound connection between the course event and the prediction. Good pacing requires delivering the rationale for the prediction so that it is comprehensible, matches the students' current worldview, and is irrefutable. The most common error is to toss in a quick prediction during an introduction without making a serious effort to "sell" the concepts to the listeners. For example, a simple statement that the group will probably fall apart and fight during a peak climb will have little impact. Contrast that quick prediction with the following concluding remarks to a peak climb introduction.

I'd like to say one final thing before we begin the climb. All of you look rested and very enthusiastic right now. And I have heard a number of you saying things about supporting each other, and making it to the top together, and really being up for this. And I appreciate those ideas. But I wouldn't be giving you the whole story if I didn't tell you about something that you're probably going to face during the climb.

As each of you moves up the mountain, you're going to experience your own individual encounter with the stress of climbing. For some of you, that stress will be mostly physical. As you move up, you'll become more and more tired until it seems like a huge effort to simply place one foot in front of the other. When that happens, you might start blaming yourself for slowing everyone down and wish that you had never come, or even wish that they would leave you behind. On the other hand, you might get angry with the rest of the patrol for going too fast or with the instructors for placing you on a peak that was obviously too

much for you. Rationalizations for why you should quit will be running through your mind: "I'm not into mountain climbing" or "I've always had a physical problem with my knee, or my ankle, or whatever." Or you may have all these things going on at the same time: you might be depressed and blaming yourself or angry and resentful, and you could have lots of rationalizations about why you should quit.

Others of you will have a different experience. While you might get a bit tired, you won't be even close to exhaustion. You may look at the slow people and wish they weren't holding everything up so much; you want to get to the top, and get it over with, and they just won't move. You might sprint ahead and get separated from the group. Or maybe you'll stay near the slow ones but the comments you make about their pace will let them know you're angry with them.

I guess what I'm trying to tell you is that you have more than a mountain to climb out there. This experience is going to tell you something about yourself. And how the whole group interacts is going to say something about this patrol. I wish I could be optimistic and predict that everything will come out all right--there are ways to have a successful peak climb as an Outward Bound patrol; but some small signs that I've observed thus far on the course make me believe that people will be thinking more of themselves than of others, and more of their own physical comfort than of the real purpose of the climb.

Note how much effort was made in this prediction to align it with the experience of the students. It began by pacing their present level of enthusiasm accurately. Beginning an introduction with an accurate reflection of the students' current feelings makes it likely that they will accept the instructor's estimates of their future feelings and reactions.

Including explicit, concrete details like "huge effort to place one foot in front of the other" increases the probability that the students will begin to experience those feelings in their imagination. As they listen, some may think, "That's me" or "I could do that." This kind of reaction helps make the prediction salient during the actual climb. The students will encounter this particular peak in the context of the predictions offered in the introduction.

One useful variation on the prediction of failure paradox is to add a comparison between this particular patrol and the average patrol, or to describe the odds of success explicitly. This variation could have been included in the peak climbing introduction by concluding with something like the following. "I would like to hope that you will be able to master this peak climb without squabbling and falling apart as a group. However, I've done this climb with students several times before and I have to tell you that only a few groups are able to complete it without a major fight, getting strung out on the trail, or two or three of the slow people feeling completely abandoned by the faster members. So I want to wish you luck, but I also want to let you know the real odds you're facing."

Obviously, in using this approach, one hopes that the students will be motivated by the challenge of beating the odds and proving that they are among the few patrols which can climb the peak and simultaneously maintain a sense of group harmony. Just as obviously, this kind of "competitive" prediction must be used carefully or it can backfire and result in a counterattack from students who dislike being compared with other groups.

Restraining Comments

Another useful paradoxical technique is the restraining comment. In the restraining comment, the instructor acknowledges that the patrol has been doing quite well; however, he goes on to say that he is concerned that they are

making progress too quickly--that they are doing too well. He concludes the restraining comment by advising them to grow or learn or succeed at a slower pace.

At times the instructor may even suggest that it will be necessary for the patrol to prepare themselves for a relapse into their former, less positive behaviors. In extreme cases, he can ask the patrol to stage a literal relapse. This rather surprising suggestion is often justified by the rationale that the patrol needs to understand their past behaviors in detail before giving them up forever.

Restraining comments are particularly useful when a patrol has had a success experience after the instructor predicted failure. If, for example, the patrol described above has completed their peak climb successfully, the following restraining comment might be included in the introduction to, say, a day of hiking through difficult terrain.

I know that yesterday I told you that you all were going to have lots of difficulty with controlling your own emotions and with cooperating as a group as you climbed that peak. And as we all know, you proved me wrong. And of course, I'm glad that I was wrong.

Well, today we are going to be hiking and orienting our way through some difficult terrain. While it will probably be physically easier than yesterday's climb, it may be harder because there will be some mystery, some ambiguity, about it. You may not always trust the judgment of your leader, not always be sure you are doing the right thing. And that's a potentially stressful situation, a time when if you don't pull together, tightly, you can really fall apart in a big way.

Well, I guess I just want to say I'm happy about how well you did yesterday but I'm concerned that your success on the mountain may sort of set you up, because you might expect that you'll do as well today as you did yesterday. And I feel that I need to prepare you for some other behaviors, because there's a good chance that they may occur.

You see, it's kind of unnatural for a group of students to move through an entire course without some kind of fairly major interpersonal conflict; in fact, we kind of count on that as part of what helps you to grow here. So please don't be surprised if you have some difficulties keeping yourself centered or have a hard time cooperating. Yesterday was really excellent, but in a way it was almost too excellent. We're a bit worried that you are getting along too well. Most of all, we're worried that you will expect this kind of success as part of your typical functioning and be disappointed when you have some troubles.

Effective restraining comments create a typical positive double bind--a win-win situation. If the students continue to succeed, the instructor can know part of their success was due to his ability to enhance their motivation. If they relapse, they are prepared to handle the failure more effectively. Failure is most devastating when it comes about unexpectedly; restraining comments prevent that sense of surprise.

Another benefit of restraining comments is that they often create powerful debriefs. In the example above, any negativity during the hiking day is already framed as a relapse into non team-orientated behaviors. Beginning the debriefing with that context already established helps the group focus immediately on key issues and is conducive to positive group process outcomes.

The Employment of Paradoxical Techniques

Chronic resistance on the part of students can often be attributed to the overuse of direct methods with people who have learned that responding to these types of approaches is unhelpful or even dangerous. This kind of overuse is equivalent to using the "right" thing with

the "wrong" people. There is an axiom from psychotherapy that speaks to this strategy: "if what you are doing is not working, try something else." While this saying is simple and logical, it is surprising how frequently it is ignored. Often, instructors continue to use a direct approach ad nauseam even after it has failed repeatedly. With this in mind, paradoxical techniques can be the "something else" that will succeed when standard approaches have repeatedly run into a brick wall.

When should this "something else" be employed? Obviously, an instructor does not want to overuse the paradoxical approach. If failure was predicted for every activity, the power of the predictions would be lost by the repetition of the technique.

An often cited rule of thumb is that double binds should only be invoked when the instructor believes that inspiration, support, reasoning and confrontation will not work. Use the direct approaches whenever possible; reserve the indirect or paradoxical techniques when nothing else is effective.

While this suggestion is both simple and appealing, some paradoxical experts have argued that it is useful to apply these techniques even when a direct approach would be effective (Fisch, Weakland and Segal, 1983). According to this point of view, paradox works well with dysfunctional individuals but it works even more effectively with high functioning people. In other words, paradox can contribute to the efficiency of the Outward Bound course by allowing students to learn certain lessons more quickly.

Probably the most pragmatic answer to "when" is that it depends on an instructor's experience and style. When instructors first begin to use paradoxical approaches, they tend to employ them primarily after the failure of traditional techniques. As they gain in experience and skill, they try them in a variety of situations, including ones where direct approaches would work. And finally, their experience and natural inclinations dictate how often and with whom they practice the model.

Instructors who are not familiar with paradoxical approaches may be concerned that the effects of these techniques will fade over time. It can be argued that a double bind success is not a real success, that, somehow, the reliance on paradox will make the achievement forced, artificial and hollow. According to this belief, only a student who does it all on his own--who is unsupported by the extra motivation generated by paradox, and who is completely free to fail--has earned a real success.

This argument fails to recognize the essential legitimacy of the Outward Bound experience. The course challenges are so real that any attempt to "fake" one's way through them will fail; the activities are so demanding that only a deep and sincere alignment with one's own strengths leads to success. A success in this context stands on its own. It has a basic integrity--an integrity that cannot be touched by varying instructional styles or techniques.

Furthermore, regardless of what pedagogical model is employed, all Outward Bound instructors attempt to enhance student motivation. Motivating students does not cause their successes to be "artificial" or "hallow;" these feelings generally occur when the instructor does not allow the students to operate with sufficient freedom. Neither the paradoxical nor the traditional approaches advocate this type of overinvolvement.

Another criticism of the paradoxical approach is that it may enhance the probability of success so effectively that students will not learn how to handle failure. While that would be a lovely problem to have, paradox is simply not effective enough to eliminate all failure! An Outward Bound course is so complex and demanding that there will always be plenty of opportunity to learn from mistakes.

If paradoxical techniques are em-

ployed unskillfully, they can seem sarcastic or uncaring. The key to avoiding this dilemma is to choose one's words carefully and attempt to understand how they will sound from the student's perspective. One should also stay sensitive to more subtle factors such as tone and style; even if the words are correct, poor delivery can still irritate some listeners. One of the best guidelines for avoiding problems with tone and style is to avoid using these techniques with students that one dislikes. The dislike will tend to come through regardless of attempts to mask or hide it. At best, the resulting paradoxical communication will be ineffective; at worst, it may damage the instructor-student relationship.

There is some debate among adherents and opponents of the paradoxical approach as to whether it is entirely honest. Critics have argued that the indirect approach is manipulative and deceitful; some clinicians have even claimed that paradoxical therapists lie to and mislead clients. Obviously these issues of integrity and trust are fundamental for any therapeutic or educational relationship.

One of the most effective ways to avoid ethical problems is to ensure that all predictions of failure and restraining comments are strictly honest and accurate. Do not predict failures or suggest that a patrol's progress is too rapid unless those failures are, in fact, likely and the progress actually has been impressive.

The more one works with reframing, the more difficult it becomes to believe that there is only one way to understand a situation or that only one way to present the facts is correct and complete. Effectively pacing a student worldview often moves an instructor far away from his own way of seeing a situation. And building the rationale that underlies successful employment of paradoxical techniques frequently requires an instructor to adopt a radical perspective on the behaviors of a student. In the context of this sort of reframing, simple definitions of truth begin to fail.

Instructors need to work with these techniques and then make ethical decisions from their own experience. Perhaps, though, one rule could be emphasized. If the instructor feels manipulative, or if he believes that he is lying to the students, that quality of manipulation or deception will be transmitted. In this situation, paradoxical techniques will not lead to positive outcomes.

The Utilization Approach

Most of the preceding section on double binds concentrates on how to employ the paradoxical approach prior to a course activity; this section on utilization concentrates on how an instructor can operate paradoxically in the midst of an activity. Utilization, paradox and double binds are highly similar concepts; in fact, some professionals use the terms interchangeably. However, for the organizational convenience of this paper, utilization will be reserved for interventions performed in the midst of course events.

From a historical perspective, the utilization approach is the primary forerunner of modern paradoxical methods. Developed by Milton Erickson, its emphasis is on using whatever behaviors are presented by the client as fulcrums for change and growth. Since these behaviors are "used" by the therapist--as opposed to the more traditional tactics of ignoring, replacing or fighting them--the approach was called the utilization method.

Milton Erickson was a hypnotherapist in the early and middle parts of this century when not much was known about trance work. In those days, the only way to induce a hypnotic trance was via direct suggestion. For example, therapists would tell their clients that their eyes were getting heavy, they would be unable to move a part their bodies, and they were sinking into a deep sleep. While this approach worked well with some of their patients, a significant per-

centage of people were unable to attain trance via such direct suggestions. Erickson first shocked and then stimulated the field of hypnosis by developing a set of techniques which could take almost any behavior and use that behavior to induce a trance. Using an Ericksonian approach, it was no longer necessary for the clients to follow rigid suggestions and to enter trance via a predefined sequence of events; instead, almost any set of behaviors could be used as the basis for hypnosis.

One well-known Ericksonian anecdote illustrating the utilitization method concerns a man who came to Erickson convinced he could not enter a trance because his mind wandered rapidly from point to point. Erickson utilized this presenting behavior and helped the man go into hypnosis by focusing his attention sequentially on a number of items in his office such as the shape of the file cabinet, the sound of the cars in the street outside, the smell of the roses on the desk, the weight of his body sinking into the chair, the warmth suffusing his limbs as he noticed their stillness, and so on. As Erickson proceeded, he chose focal points conducive to entering trance, altered the rhythm of his client's mental wandering, and interspersed indirect suggestions about relaxation. Soon the man entered a trance.

One vital factor in this induction was Erickson's ability to build rapport with this man by reframing his tendencies toward mental wandering as useful and admirable. Erickson told him that the mental wandering indicated that the man was innately curious, and that curiosity is positive in that it provides knowledge and information.

Furthermore, he told the man that he should not fight this tendency; rather, he should practice it more wholeheartedly. This reframe increased the man's trust in Erickson and minimized his anxiety about entering trance. Of course, while the continuation of the behavior was encouraged, there was a slight but significant difference: the man's mind was compelled to wander under Erickson's direction. The induction was so successful because the patient was predisposed to cooperate with his natural behavior patterns.

This anecdote reveals all of the essential principles of the utilization approach. First, a decision is made to avoid using a direct approach to change a client's problematic behavior. As mentioned above, direct approaches refer to common sense, logical, and straightforward techniques like inspiration, support, confrontation, and reasoning. Such approaches are problematic in that they may lead to denial, defensiveness and resistance. It is time consuming, energy-intensive and difficult to surmount this resistance. If it is anticipated that these types of problems will occur, it is best to bypass them by choosing to use indirect techniques.

Second, since it is likely that the problem behavior will occur regardless of anyone's attempt to stop it, the practitioner of a utilization approach does not fight the inevitable. In fact, he generally encourages the client to continue to emit the particular behavior. However, the meaning, the context, the amount, the duration, or the exact form of the behavior is altered so that manifesting the behavior no longer has the same results.

Third, both the encouragement of the behavior and its alteration are justified by reframing. Often this reframing is based on a rationale describing the positive aspects of practicing the behavior. Not only does such a rationale motivate the client to follow the paradoxical therapist's directives, it also builds rapport.

Fourth, the eventual result of the utilization approach is either a minimization or cessation of the behavior. This occurs because the therapist's encouragement of the action and/or the subtle modifications of its practice have made it unappealing. Or, and this is an even more elegant result, the meaning of behav-

ior becomes significantly altered--altered to the point where emitting it is now therapeutic.

In this Erickson anecdote, it is possible to see the sequencing of the four steps of the utilization approach. First, Erickson accepted the fact that it would be difficult to change the client's proclivity towards mental wandering by a direct approach; therefore, he decided to use indirect techniques. Second, he encouraged the client to continue the problematic behavior: the mental wandering. However, the wandering was subtly changed; the man's attention wandered under Erickson's direction. Third, Erickson achieved a quick rapport with the client by implicitly reframing the problem behavior as positive. Not only did the man relax a bit, he was also motivated to follow Erickson's subsequent directions. Fourth, the problematic behavior of a restless mind was eliminated as the man relaxed into trance.

When the utilization approach is dissected, it appears simple and straightforward. However, this apparent simplicity tends to mask a vital point: utilization techniques are almost always based on a creative leap where the very behavior that has been cast as the problem now forms the basis of the solution. What makes Erickson's intervention so brilliant was not his specific actions, it was his ability to design an intervention that was unbounded by formal traditions. Clients and students tend to be fixated on one way of understanding their behaviors; unfortunately, therapists and instructors can become equally fixated. The most challenging aspect of the utilization approach is its requirement that one be capable of radical shifts in perspective.

I once had an experience with an alcoholic student on an Outward Bound course which provides a good illustration of the utilization approach. The man was a scientist[2] who prided himself on his rationality and self-control. He had been very detached from the course and had not been significantly moved by any of the individual or group challenges.

This man had a strong and genuine fear of heights. We were about to do the ropes course and it was clear that he would have an extremely difficult time with certain of the events. His fear seemed so powerful that there appeared to be little hope of minimizing it via supportive techniques such as offering encouraging comments. My co-instructor and I decided to practice a utilization approach which we hoped would enhance his ropes course experience. We also hoped that the intervention would deepen his involvement with Outward Bound and his recovery process.

As we had expected, he was extremely anxious as he began the ropes course; however, he managed to inch himself through the first few, relatively easy events. But when he came to the high beam, he was stymied. He had great difficulty letting go of the tree that anchored one end of the beam. When he did move six inches away from the tree, he immediately clutched the overhead safety wire and refused to proceed. He was visibly trembling and sweating, the epitome of anxiety.

Instead of trying a predictable intervention such as attempting to talk him through it, the following suggestions were offered:

Mike, I want you to continue holding on to the safety wire and listen to me for a moment. I have something to say that may surprise you a bit. In a kind of strange way, I'm pleased that you are as nervous as you are. Keep holding on while I tell you why I'm pleased that you're so nervous.

In attempting to become sober you're trying to do one of the most difficult things you've ever done. And you know it won't be easy; and you know you're going to have to work hard and overcome lots of obstacles to make it. No matter how much you want to do it, there will come a time when it will feel impossible--when you know you can't stay sober. You have a chance today to

learn how you react when faced with those feelings.

I'd like you to stop a second and think a bit and then tell me a few changes you really want to make in your life around sobriety. [He told me that: 1) he wanted a reconciliation with his son; 2) he wanted to maintain his sobriety; and 3) he wanted to be more genuine in his interactions with others at work.]

Okay, Mike, those sound like great goals. Now in a moment I'm going to ask you to say a sentence about one of those ideas. For example, say: "I'm going to quit drinking because I want to be a better father to my son" or "I'm going to be real with the people at work." And after you say that sentence, I want you to take your hand off the safety wire and move one step closer to the other end of the beam. And then say another sentence relating to one of your goals. And again, I want you to master your belief that you can't do something, and take another step. Do you understand what I'm saying? [Mike indicated he did.]

Mike followed the instructions and made a statement with every step. While he did grab for the safety line several times, he made it across. And he did it under his own power, without any other support. The experience moved him deeply and it moved the other alcoholics as well. Watching a trembling, almost paralyzed man make a statement about sobriety and then temporarily master his fear and take a step forward had a profound impact.

In this example, the four utilization steps were employed as follows. First, his fear was strong and relatively resistant to direct change methods; therefore, we decided to utilize it for therapeutic purposes. Second, the behavior was encouraged; we told him we were pleased that he was afraid. We also changed the expression of the fear slightly; he was to combine it with a statement about sobriety. Third, the encouragement to perform the behavior was based on a positive reframe. His fear was no longer seen as a nervousness about heights--something which was embarrassing or uncomfortable; rather, it was a profound and meaningful opportunity to test his ability to move forward in the face of feelings of hopelessness. The reframe was partially accomplished by our verbal messages and partly by requiring him to precede each act of courage by a statement about sobriety. Fourth, the meaning of his experience had now been sufficiently altered so that his formerly problematic action--the fear--was now a therapeutic opportunity.

Most utilization approaches seem simple and obvious in hindsight. However, at the moment they are needed, in the heat of an ongoing Outward Bound activity, it is often difficult to resist responding in a traditional way to a problem. It was tempting to suggest that Mike use deep breathing; we also thought about climbing into the trees with him and talking him across the beam. While these methods might have worked--at least to some degree--they would not have resulted in the deep level of involvement and commitment elicited by the utilization approach. Of course, it is possible that the same approach would backfire with another student. For example, Mike could have discounted the instructions completely by saying that his sobriety and his relationship with his son had nothing to do with walking the high beam. If he had responded that way, the instructors would have looked like simplistic moralists.

In this example, the key to success was our judgment that the intervention would be well received--that Mike was open to this frame of his problem. We guessed that he felt guilty about his alcoholism and his relationships at work and with his family. Successfully passing through the painful experience on the high beam would not only give him an empowerment experience, it would also function as a kind of

"penance" for his guilt. In sum, there were several subtle reasons why we believed that Mike would be receptive to these instructions.

Another example of the utilization approach occurred during a Trust Fall activity. A young, attractive woman had become nervous about falling backwards and repeatedly hesitated each time she attempted to drop into her teammates' arms. All of the males were trying to help her by making a variety of suggestions and supportive statements. Significantly, the female members of the group were less active. The more help that was offered, the more stuck the woman appeared to be. After a number of failed attempts to get her to fall, the group was close to becoming frustrated. Some felt like continuing to support the woman; others appeared to be on the verge of confronting her; and almost everyone was uncomfortable. At that point, I stepped forward and made the following suggestion:

Kathy, I can see that you are stuck up there and I know it's a lousy feeling this early on the course to have already run into a problem. Now, I don't really know what it is that you are trying to let go of up there, but I want to suggest that what you need to let go of is something really important for you[3].

Just hold the tree and listen to me for a second. I've been watching what's going on here and what I see is a lot of guys giving you a lot of support and encouragement. And in general I think that kind of support is great. But I'm a little concerned in your case, because I'm afraid that even when you do fall, it won't be like you did it by yourself; it'll be more like you did it with all these people's support and encouragement. And I feel somehow that it would be especially good for you to do something for yourself, by yourself.

But in another way, I'm a bit hesitant to ask you to do that because you might be giving up a lot. It's really hard in our society to be a strong woman who's capable of taking care of herself; in fact, lots of men don't like that kind of woman. And if you learned to be strong and independent up here, I'm not sure how many problems you'd run into back home with your new, assertive behavior. A pretty, helpless, and dependent woman can have a smooth ride in this world, but an assertive and strong one is pretty often called a bitch.

So even though I know you don't really want to, I could understand if a part of you wished to stay helpless and dependent. And I mean that seriously; I know that the other choice--to be independent and strong--could make your life much harder. I'd like you to think about it that for a moment.

After a bit--a minute or so--someone down here will count to three and you will either choose to fall or not. If you don't fall at three, I'm going to ask that you simply come down and rejoin the group without making any more attempts. Also, I'm going to ask the patrol to be quiet and stop helping you.

The woman fell easily on her next try. She was angry with me and explained that she had long ago made up her mind to be strong and independent. All that had stopped her from succeeding on the trust fall was that the support from all the men had distracted her.

The patrol was not sure if my interpretation had been accurate but they did stay sensitized to her in terms of dependence/independence issues. Later on in the course, they confronted her about these issues during a debriefing. She had not pulled her share of the sled during a ski trip and the group felt that she was using her femininity to manipulate them and get out of work. She resisted the confrontation briefly, but then admitted that they were right. Following this admission, she resolved to demonstrate a new commitment to self-reliance and independence on the upcoming ropes course.

The next day she impressed everyone with her courage, resolve, and independence as she

made a voluntary choice to attempt some of the most difficult ropes course events. She moved through the challenging activities virtually without support even though they were quite difficult.

Once again the four steps of the model were employed. First, direct approaches were being practiced ad nauseam by the men in the group and no progress was being achieved; therefore, an indirect approach was chosen. Second, her behavior was reframed positively. Her hesitancy was not seen as indicative of a fear of heights or falling; rather, it was seen as a commitment to a life strategy that enabled her to relate to men successfully. Third, the behavior was encouraged--it was "understandable" that she wanted to get along with men. But a not-so-subtle alteration in the meaning of "getting along with men" was offered equating her male relationship strategies with dependency and helplessness. Fourth, the alteration in meaning was so unappealing that she chose to abandon the behavior. Her motivation to fall was partially fueled by her anger at me; my reframe clearly made me an enemy, someone to be proved wrong. This anger made her polarity response--her tendency to do the opposite of what I had suggested--particularly powerful.

The key to the successful employment of the utilization approach is the creative ability to view apparently negative behaviors in a different, usually positive, frame. There is a beneficial aspect to even the worst actions; if one is capable of seeing the behaviors from another perspective, from within the student's worldview, some kind of redeeming value will emerge.

Prior to this kind of positive reframe, almost everyone else who has reacted to the behavior has concentrated on pointing out its negative aspects. This feedback causes the student to hold on desperately to the positive aspects, knowing that he is the only one who perceives them. When the instructor supports the positive aspects, the student can relax his grip on them for a moment and be free to experience the negative side. This may be the first time he has seen the whole picture. Since, in general, the negative aspects of the behaviors are much stronger than the positive side, the experience of a wholistic viewpoint can lead to quick change.

Of course, this reevaluation process does not necessarily happen consciously; often, it will occur outside of the student's awareness. The fact that these processes do operate at the unconscious level so frequently is one of the reasons that pardox and utilization have earned a reputation of operating like "magic."

Conclusion

Erickson gained the reputation of being a therapeutic "wizard" for his creative and effective employment of the utilization approach. He was consistently doing something unexpected, looking at a situation from a perspective that was unconventional or even weird, achieving results that were difficult to explain via traditional models. This aura of "magic" made the utilization approach daunting to other professionals; as a result, especially in Erickson's early years, very few therapists attempted to replicate his techniques.

Even the modified Ericksonian techniques described in this article might seem somewhat overwhelming to an Outward Bound instructor. It may be tempting to dismiss them, believing that they lie in the purview of the trained psychotherapist, feeling that they are beyond the scope of the average instructor.

That rejection, however, would be a mistake. While paradox appears to be difficult initially, a limited amount of practice will reveal that it is simply another form of common sense. The rules may differ slightly from the ones governing direct techniques, but in their own context, they are just as logical and straightforward.

It is simpler to learn to use paradox if one begins with introductions and then moves on to the utilization approach. Introductions tend to be easier because one can prepare them ahead of time. Using prediction of failure introductions provides experience in terms of perceiving the positive aspects of seemingly negative behaviors. After practicing this perspective in introductions, it will be easier to be sensitive to similar patterns in the midst of a course activity. Then one can implement a utilization-type intervention in a spontaneous and natural manner.

Both paradox and the utilization approach are intended to complement and supplement the interpersonal methods currently practiced at Outward Bound. In general, the courses will be most effective if these direct techniques continue to dominate the way in which instructors interact with students. More specifically, it is not recommended that these methods be replaced by paradox and utilization; in fact, it is suggested that direct techniques continue to be used 80% to 90% of the time. However, when one has a feeling that these tried and true approaches will not work, or if one believes that an indirect technique will work more quickly or effectively, then these alternatives can be employed.

It is a mistake to conceptualize paradox and utilization as techniques, as one more addition to the instructor's "bag of tricks." Certainly there are paradoxical techniques like "prediction of failure" or "restraining comments," yet one should not simply lump these together with other techniques like group debriefing skills or initiative games. The paradoxical model is different because it is based on different assumptions about how people learn and grow.

Even as Freud and his psychodynamic model challenged the prevailing psychological concepts of his time, paradox confronts current definitions of human learning and development. Freud's major contribution was the concept of the critical importance of childhood experience; his method rested on helping patients work through developmental traumas. This approach to treatment and personal growth was a radical challenge to the then dominant paradigms of reason, will, and simplistic empiricism.

The paradoxical approach offers an equally radical challenge to the psychological paradigms which dominate current thought. Paradox is not simply a way of helping a person change more quickly or more effectively; instead, it is a system that is founded on a different set of beliefs about the capacity of people to learn and grow. To describe these underlying assumptions in detail is beyond the purview of this article; interested readers are referred to Zeig (1980), Haley (1973), Madanes (1984), Fisch, Weakland and Segal (1983), Lankton and Lankton (1983), and Weeks and L'Abate (1982). In an entirely oversimplified form, however, it can be argued that the paradoxical adherents believe that people are capable of making healthy choices--capable of turning their lives around quickly and relatively easily--if the repetitive strategies that lock their lives into unproductive patterns can be interrupted.

This assumption, and especially its belief that people can change easily, strongly confronts the paradigms which currently rule psychology and human development. It contradicts the medical model and its adherence to the deterministic nature of genes and biochemistry and the psychodynamic model and its belief in the overriding power of early childhood experience.

Outward Bound does not need to subscribe to one model or another in order to conduct successful adventure-based courses. Indeed, it has its own assumptions about how people learn and grow (c.f., Vokey, 1987). But Outward Bound instructors do operate in the context of prevailing theories about how people

change. Those who choose to use the paradoxical approach may find themselves doing more than adding a few techniques to their "bag of tricks," they may be implicitly embracing a new set of assumptions about human learning.

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Footnotes

1. Students and instructors come in both sexes. However, in order to conform with literary convention and to maximize readability, the masculine third person pronoun will be used to represent both sexes.

2. Certain identifying details about the individuals used in examples have been altered to preserve confidentiality.

3. In this version of the Trust Fall, students are asked to concentrate on what they want to "let go of." The emphasis is on the renunciation of psychological obstacles, as opposed to the traditional emphasis on trusting others.